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Chairman:

Mr. MROZIEWICZ

(Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

OBSERVANCE OF DISARMAMENT WEEK

The CHAIRMAN: In keeping with a tradition initiated at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the First Committee is holding this special meeting to observe Disarmament Week, which began on 24 October 1991.

It is my great honour and pleasure to welcome to the First Committee Mr. Samir Shihabi, President of the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session. On behalf of the First Committee, I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election and also on the consummate diplomatic skill with which you are guiding the work of the forty-sixth session.

I also have the great honour and pleasure to welcome to the First Committee Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, the Secretary-General. Your unswerving devotion, Mr. Secretary-General, to the principles of the Organization have earned you the appreciation and admiration of us all.

In the Final Document of its first special session devoted to disarmament the General Assembly proclaimed the week starting 24 October - the day of the founding of the United Nations - as a week devoted to fostering the objectives of disarmament. Governments and non-governmental organizations have been urged to make Disarmament Week the centre-piece of efforts to increase public awareness of the dangers of the arms race and, in particular, the nuclear-arms race, and thereby to create a climate conducive to sustained progress in disarmament.

(The Chairman)

The celebration of Disarmament Week can also be an important instrument in developing a strong public consensus in favour of strengthening the multilateral bodies which deal with arms limitation and disarmament issues.

The historic events of the past year and particularly of the past month have raised dramatic hopes for deliberate and genuine progress in the field of arms control and disarmament. The announcements made recently with regard to short-range nuclear weapons by the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have indeed raised public awareness of the utility of strengthening security and stability through reductions in nuclear armaments.

While these momentous initiatives are no less important to the process of disarmament, we should be reminded that the participation of all States is necessary in order for the recent progress to be sustained. In accordance with the obligations inherent in the Charter, the maintenance of international peace and security is the collective responsibility of Member States.

(The Chairman)

Despite the recent progress which has been witnessed in the area of nuclear arms, we can still see sources of danger which call for committed and genuine multilateral action. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, missiles and conventional arms represents the most pressing threat to international peace and security and will require efforts at all levels - bilateral, regional and multilateral. The promotion of transparency and openness and the strengthening of safeguards are among the key goals in multilateral efforts to prevent the proliferation of armaments.

Pockets of turmoil at the regional level have underlined the belief that there exist imbalances which feed tensions and threaten the maintenance of peace. A range of measures is available to address the military dimension of security in these strife-torn areas, such as the reduction of armaments to stable and secure levels, the strengthening of confidence-building measures, the adoption of defensive security structures, and the promotion of modalities of conflict prevention. Multilateral arms control can play an integral part in reducing asymmetries at the regional level, in promoting transparency, and in creating a climate conducive to broader efforts in building and strengthening security.

The military dimension of security cannot be examined in a vacuum, however. Disarmament measures alone cannot guarantee peace and stability but must be considered in relation to other priorities, such as economic and social development, the safeguarding of the environment, and the protection of human rights. Indeed, an international consensus is necessary to build a cooperative climate in which nations may take collective steps to reduce their defence expenditures. While it is generally acknowledged that military spending worldwide has levelled off, arms races still exist in a number of

(The Chairman)

regions of the globe; these represent a misdirection of resources that could be better utilized in enhancing economic, social and environmental development.

During Disarmament Week, a series of events are held around the world with a view to raising the global community's awareness of disarmament issues. We trust that this week will contribute to strengthening the role which the United Nations can play in addressing such matters.

I now have the pleasure to call on the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Samir Shihabi, to address the First Committee.

Mr. SHIHABI (President of the General Assembly): I thank you for your kind words and congratulations. I wish you all the best in your endeavours.

Disarmament Week was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1978 as a week devoted to fostering the objectives of disarmament. For almost a decade, Disarmament Week was observed with alternating hopes and frustrations as we watched the process of disarmament edging on, slowly and painstakingly, often interspersed with progress and set-backs.

Today, Disarmament Week is being observed in an atmosphere of much hope and expectation. Important political changes on the world stage in the past few years have been taking place at such a speed that at times the international community had to expedite its follow-up in keeping pace with them. These changes include, notably, the replacement of East-West confrontation with cooperation, and important steps towards negotiated settlements in many areas of tension or conflict, such as Central America, Cambodia and the Middle East. These recent positive developments have transformed the global scene into one that is conducive to promoting international cooperation and strengthening peace and security, one that we could not imagine a few years ago.

(The President of the
General Assembly)

In the field of disarmament, notable events have been the signing of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe; the conclusion of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START); the recent initiatives of the United States and the Soviet Union in proposing deep cuts in their nuclear arsenals; and the accession of additional States to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We all hope that this signals the beginning of an era of mutual trust among States.

Nevertheless, even while we are counting the gains, regional conflicts - some old and some new - present continued threats to international security with their volatile natures and spill-over effects. Yet, the solution to these conflicts must lie in peaceful means, through confidence- and security-building and peaceful settlements with justice and dignity, which are prerequisites for lasting peace and stability.

The relaxation in international relations has strengthened the United Nations in that it can act more effectively and unanimously, thus bringing the Organization to the forefront of the world stage. This increased effectiveness and ability to consolidate international cooperation were evident in its response to the Gulf crisis.

In today's world of growing interdependence, the unique role of the United Nations in galvanizing international cooperation to resolve problems is becoming all the more prominent, and all the more important. This is particularly true in the field of disarmament. As we applaud bilateral achievements in arms control and disarmament, we must remember that the process of disarmament must involve the participation of all States, big and small, globally or regionally, in order to be meaningful.

(The President of the
General Assembly)

The United Nations, being the only universal organization that offers the possibility of viewing war, peace and prosperity, economic problems, human issues and scientific questions in a global perspective, will remain a major vehicle for the multilateral realization of arms limitation and disarmament objectives. But peace and stability cannot be guaranteed by disarmament measures alone: today, we continue to witness the threats to peace posed by a widening of the gap between the North and the South, the deterioration of the physical environment and the depletion of natural resources, starvation-induced migrations, the worsening economic gap, the scourge of drug trafficking and incessant violations of human rights. In a wider sense, therefore, the process of disarmament should also include efforts to redirect resources from the military sector towards ameliorating the lives and well-being of humankind.

The spirit of Disarmament Week does not lie only in the pursuit of peace and security, but also - and more important - in guaranteeing human life in prosperity and progress. It is only by combining these two goals that Disarmament Week can be celebrated in a meaningful manner.

The CHAIRMAN: It is my pleasure to call on the Secretary-General, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, to address the First Committee.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Let me thank you first of all, Mr. Chairman, for your very kind words.

As we gather here today to observe Disarmament Week, my thoughts turn first of all to Ambassador Alfonso Garcia Robles, whom we miss today. May I therefore open my statement by paying a tribute to his memory in this Committee, in which he served with unparalleled distinction and commitment, to the great and lasting benefit of all nations.

The world in which we live today reflects a gross paradox. On one hand, the magnitude of change in the basic character of relations between the major military Powers or power blocs has had a reverberating impact on the whole international security environment. Even in the short period since last year's observance of Disarmament Week we have witnessed striking political changes in Europe and the gradual but steady resolution of numerous crises and conflict situations elsewhere. With the ideological confrontations and military competition of the cold-war years having become obsolete, a comprehensive reexamination and revision of old doctrines and strategies that hindered progress towards arms reduction is a most natural development.

At the same time, even as the promise of further significant progress in arms limitation and disarmament has brightened considerably, the international situation remains unpredictable. The exacerbation of dormant tensions and the emergence of new clashes in certain areas of the world remind us how delicate the balance of security is and how much work remains to be done in strengthening the foundations of international peace and stability. It is also increasingly recognized that socio-economic and human rights questions bear as much on the issue of security as do military considerations. This poses additional challenges to multilateral action in the areas of crisis prevention, conflict resolution and disarmament.

(The Secretary-General)

Nevertheless, we are operating in a substantively improved framework. In the field of nuclear weapons, within the span of just a few years we have witnessed a dramatic change from the threat of a nuclear confrontation to the actual elimination or significant reduction of the most destabilizing of these weapons. Recent initiatives by President Bush and President Gorbachev have created conditions for the acceleration of a long-awaited process of substantive cuts and programme build-down in a number of categories of such weapons. Equally important in these initiatives is the recognition accorded to the issue of strict controls over stockpiles of nuclear weapons and the prevention of their accidental or unauthorized use. In the volatile world situation facing us today, this problem has acquired an added and ominous dimension, and it must be addressed resolutely.

A two-pronged approach to the question of nuclear weapons seems to be needed now more than ever before. We must steadfastly encourage further reductions in strategic nuclear forces and, in the context of the reductions already achieved, urge the most serious re-examination of the entire question of nuclear-weapons testing. I firmly believe that the conditions for substantial progress towards a comprehensive test-ban exist today. This opportunity must not be missed.

With the process of real nuclear disarmament already commenced, it would be militarily dangerous and morally deplorable to allow the emergence of any new nuclear-weapon State. It is most gratifying that the nuclear-weapon non-proliferation regime has been further strengthened by the adherence to it of a number of additional States. Our objective must be to make it universal. Efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons are not at all inconsistent with the legitimate rights of States to benefit from the

(The Secretary-General)

peaceful application of nuclear energy. Based on the most unfortunate Iraqi experience in recent months in this area, the international community is now in a much better position than ever before to establish criteria for a clearer distinction between the two.

The Persian Gulf conflict has taught us yet another lesson. The reckless acquisition of weapons, particularly weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery, is detrimental not only to the regions directly affected, but also to international peace and security as a whole.

In this connection, it is most encouraging that the negotiations in Geneva on a comprehensive chemical-weapons convention are entering a decisive stage and are likely to come to fruition before the end of 1992. Failure in this respect would represent a major setback for the international community, while success would close an important gap in outlawing weapons of mass destruction. A ban on chemical weapons combined with the further strengthening of the biological-weapons Convention, agreed upon at the recent Review Conference at Geneva, would have most beneficial effects on efforts to strengthen security regionally and globally.

The development of objective, fair and workable criteria and guidelines to restrain the flow of conventional weapons and weapons technologies is also badly needed. The excessive militarization of human society represented by unnecessarily high levels of armaments and military outlays can no longer be condoned. Many of the countries which find themselves in this situation cannot afford either the human or the financial cost imposed by this process.

I believe that an appropriate balance could be established whereby the legitimate security concerns of States and their need for the unhampered transfer of science and technology for social and economic development would

(The Secretary-General)

be met, while at the same time arms supplies would be limited. The first step in this direction should be taken with regard to the most destabilizing types of weapons, such as ballistic missiles. Considering the important role played by confidence- and security-building measures in transforming the European political and military scene, it is reasonable to suppose that the objective of increased transparency and openness, if applied to arms transfers, could have an equally positive impact regionally and worldwide.

I very much hope that the ongoing discussions on the subject-matter, including the proposal on an international arms-transfers register under the auspices of the United Nations, will yield concrete results. The Secretariat stands ready to carry out any role it might be given in this connection.

For a new international system to assure lasting peace and stability, enhanced political cooperation based on growing respect for the rule of international law is absolutely indispensable. In the field of disarmament a more pragmatic approach in addressing the various issues involved holds out the promise of tangible results.

As we observe Disarmament Week 1991, may I express my fervent hope that leaders everywhere will seize the opportunities opening now to make determined efforts to reverse the arms race and find new cooperative ways to accomplish the increasingly challenging tasks of building a better and more secure future for all societies.

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee has thus come to the conclusion of this special meeting, which has been devoted to the observance of Disarmament Week.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.